The *Every Child Matters* policy was published by the government in 2004, and outlined key areas for children to gain the best experience possible from their education. Dance has not historically been a huge part of this, but the benefits that it has for young people should mean that dance is a huge priority in the new national curriculum. A look into the importance of dance in education.
Every Child Matters… Still

Dance allows us to express ourselves. Creating dance can be a cathartic process. Dance is fun, exciting and energetic. We know all of this. But it seems to me that, in today’s world, some governing bodies appear to conveniently forget all of the above.

Like anything, dance has the chance to create more of an impact on someone’s life, the longer it is with them. Following this, it is argued by many dance teachers and professionals across the UK, and even the world, that dance should be considered a vital part of a young person’s education. However, dance’s position in the national curriculum has always been a shaky one, and we are now moving into a time where its position is even less certain.

In recent years, documents published by the government call for action in improving the education system for the benefit of the young people taking part in it. Every Child Matters was a document published in 2004 by the Department for Education regarding what changes could be made to improve the lives of children, young people and their families. The document outlined 5 goals that all children and young people should be able to achieve; being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, and achieving economic well being. I would argue that dance can make a considerable addition towards achieving these goals, and should therefore be considered vital the new national curriculum.

I propose to take each of the goals in turn and demonstrate how dance could do this, before looking at the wider arts and cultural context, and offering possible solutions to our current issues.

Being Healthy

It goes without saying that dance can go some way to keep young people fit and healthy, as a physical activity. However, dance has always been an area of conflict in the curriculum; the debate as to whether it should stand alone as a subject area, or be included in either the arts or physical education is still under dispute today.

Catherine Dulin, in her MA Thesis, Physical Education or Art?, tracks the history of dance’s inclusion in the national curriculum. She makes the point that physical education was taught mainly by women until the 1950s. Women were also the main recipients of dance training during this period, and this is perhaps the reason why dance was initially included in the curriculum, as part of PE [Dulin 14]. Dulin moves on to describe the situation in 1964; when the government saw the education system as producing Britain’s workforce, and therefore PE and Dance were no longer “needed.” [Dulin 19].
Of course, this school of thought didn’t stay around for too long, as it became apparent that physical activity was not only important for a child’s development, but also for their health.

The accurate teaching of dance can offer a variety of physical education activities for young people within school. Dancers are involved in technique classes, which ask for the body to work on movements in a variety of complex positions. These require practice and stamina. The body conditioning opportunities that dance allows for also help with building a young person’s skills in the above. All dancers should engage in fitness training that enables them to enhance their performance skills. By this, I do not simply mean a dancer’s performance onstage, but performance akin to that of an athlete.

It is perhaps because of these skills that dance teachers have, that they are now being asked to teach PE as well, as Take Art has discovered during its Dance in Schools programme, which was launched in September 2012. It’s great that these skills are being recognised to some extent, however as a result dance as a subject and a skill set in its own right is being neglected by the eyes of both the government and the senior management teams in secondary schools. Following a discussion with Katey Leader, Dance Director at Take Art, it became apparent that dance, drama and PE teachers in Somerset would equally like to develop dance, but are not necessarily being given the chance to do so by their head teachers.

On the flip side, when dance is taught by those who aren’t trained in the correct fields, we have an equally problematic situation. The quality of the work falls down, meaning that senior managers in schools become even less enthusiastic about the inclusion of the subject in the curriculum. Although PE teachers have a set of specialist, and rather brilliant skills, they aren’t able to teach dance in the correct way, simply because they have not been trained to do so.

**Staying Safe**

The second priority in the *Every Child Matters* policy is “Staying Safe”. At first glance, it may seem that dance cannot help children to stay safe, but programmes such as the *Get Kids Off The Street* project in New York, have proved that dance is a viable option for bringing safe and valuable activities to children who would otherwise be in danger of drug abuse and suchlike.

On a related issue, in March 2013, I undertook a project entitled *Portraits of Urban Worlds* at Pavilion Dance South West, which involved young people of varying ages working with parkour and street dance.

Parkour (sometimes referred to as freerunning) is taking the UK by storm, and many young people want to learn how to execute the fantastical moves and somersaults
off buildings and other constructions. However, some young people are attempting these moves on their own, without supervision or proper training. This, of course, is extremely dangerous, and this was one of the reasons that we put the Portraits of Urban Worlds project together. Bethany Junior School in Boscombe approached us, saying that their students were passionate about parkour but were travelling to unsafe places to try out the moves on their own. They wanted PDSW to find a way of combating this; perhaps training the children to execute parkour safely.

Portraits of Urban Worlds was devised in response to this. The project involved training young people in the fields of street dance and performance parkour, to then create choreography that would appear in a new dance film, directed by David McKenna. A group of thirty 9, 10 and 11 year olds from Bethany Junior School had 7 parkour training sessions with Scott Jackson, our resident parkour tutor, before being choreographed on the morning of the film shoot by David McKenna.

Scott’s focus for the training sessions was on safety and efficient movement. He initially taught simple jumps, and how to bend your knees upon landing to minimise the chance of injury. He talked about how, when doing tricks, more than one part of your body should always be in contact with a surface, to reduce the risk of falling. There were also exercises in rolling and how to fall safely.

We were amazed with how quickly the students picked up these safety skills, and how they retained the information perfectly from week to week. Once the filming day arrived, myself and the school teachers had no qualms about allowing the students to perform their choreography on the beach, hopping over deck chairs and even over each other.

For me, this project proved that given the correct instruction and/or tools, young children can gain knowledge of self preservation and basic health and safety advice. The students demonstrated putting all of this knowledge into practice throughout the film shoot. It follows that, dance can be a vehicle for teaching children about safety. If a young person is experiencing a dance or parkour workshop, they can apply the information directly to what they are doing, giving them an awareness that they might have never achieved before.

Enjoying and Achieving

If we enjoy something, we are keen to learn more about it and to experience it in different ways. The same goes for education; if a child enjoys education, they are more likely to achieve.

In previous years, the national curriculum has not allowed for different types of learning, despite acknowledging that there are different types of learners. Kinesthetic learners work well by doing things; they learn by carrying out actions or
repeating movements to help them remember facts and figures. Visual learners pick up information by seeing images or presentations, whereas auditory learners take in the information that they hear, more than through any other method.

Previously, the national curriculum has not catered for kinaesthetic learners, whose learning through movement means that dance would be a brilliant way to help them make the most of their education. This would mean a multidisciplinary approach to lessons, which the original Every Child Matters document touched upon:

*Multi-disciplinary working helps to ensure that children, young people and their families are given swift and simple access to the complementary skills of a wide range of people working together.*

*Every Child Matters, pg. 17*

An innovative approach to teaching mathematics through dance, could be seen in teaching a topic on reflections. Reflecting the movements of two bodies could be used to demonstrate this concept to kinaesthetic learners. Alternatively, street dance includes a technique called tutting, which uses the movement of just the hands to make shapes, which could help in teaching simple geometry.

I am certainly not suggesting that this is always the method in which other subjects should be taught, simply that this is a valuable option for a certain kind of learner, which has not previously been considered. Fortunately, the new national curriculum for Primary Age children, does allow for this kind of multi-artform learning. However, in secondary education there is less lee-way for it, as the subjects are split up into different departments and staff, I would propose that, whilst the current secondary curriculum is under discussion, the possibility of multidisciplinary teaching should be considered, and suggestions should be made for how different subject areas and departments can work together.

Conversely, it’s not just about the different kinds of learners that are encountered in a school setting; it’s also about the varied backgrounds that those children come from. As Darren Henley commented in his report on *Cultural Education in England*:

*School will inevitably form the most significant part of a child’s education. This is particularly the case with children who come from the most deprived backgrounds.*

*Cultural Education in England, pg. 13*

The above point is extremely important for me. Some children will never be introduced to culture or the arts through their life at home, due to the background that they come from. As a result, school becomes the only route for some young people to pursue and enjoy the arts. If the education system does not provide them with options to experience the arts, some young people may never gain an understanding of the artistic and cultural heritage of this country, and in other ways,
they may never have access to career pathways that they may have liked to pursue.

Unfortunately, the current emphasis on league tables, and the recent discussions around the Ebacc qualifications have lead to the status of some subjects, including the arts, falling dramatically:

*Emphasis on the more traditional subjects means that in some cases, schools promote the subjects that carry more weight in the accountability and inspection frameworks.*

*Creative Pages, pg. 8 (Adrian, Assistant Head, Kent)*

I believe that this is a very dangerous route to go down. In addition to limited access to the arts for children from deprived backgrounds, the lack of arts subjects in the curriculum would lead to young people leaving school with a narrow set of skills, and a rather closed view of the world, and the industries that inhabit it. The arts allow young people to gain skills which are relevant to many of the industries in the modern world, therefore giving them the best chance at flourishing in the modern workplace.

The arts provide students with communication skills; analytical skills as well as speaking and listening. Students are tasked with presenting themselves in a professional manner, and in qualifications such as BTEC Level 3 Performing Arts, students need to learn how to pitch creative ideas to industry professionals. Dance is also one of the subjects that can encourage confidence among young people; having the confidence to get up onstage can translate to many other situations where you will need to face a large group of people, such as managing a team, or making a business presentation.

To conclude, dance provides more than just the knowledge and ability to put your limbs in certain positions; it gives young people knowledge and skills that are vital to many modern industries and begins to prepare them for the world of work.

**Making a positive contribution**

*New technological developments mean that it is easier for young people themselves to make a significant contribution to the cultural lives of people of all ages.*

*Cultural Education in England, pg. 10*

I remember one of my first dance experiences being in secondary school, and working backstage on a dance and music event. The aim of the event was to raise money for the Macmillan Nurses. At the tender age of 15, I was already learning how
dance can be used (and is commonly used in schools) to help put on spectacular events that raise money for charities or other good causes.

However, it’s not just fundraising that dance can contribute to. The most recent and the most memorable experience that dance played a part in, was the Cultural Olympiad. The Opening Ceremonies of both the Olympic and the Paralympic Games were rife with dance. They were inspiring moments that brought the nation together, and firmly planted the UK as a world leader in the arts. Participation was at the heart of the experience – hundreds of dancers from across the UK went down to London for the rehearsals and performed on the night.

The Cultural Olympiad and Festival 2012, which occurred during the run up to the Games, saw thousands of children and young people get involved in events that no doubt they will remember for the rest of their lives.

At the time, I was lucky enough to be working on Cheshire Dance and Walk The Plank’s The Moment When… which was one of the flagship projects for the North West of England. Around 500 young people joined us to dance at Chester Racecourse as part of the torch ceremony there, and a further 200 joined us at Tatton Park as part of Festival 2012. These young people were part of a moment in history, thanks to dance.

**Achieving Economic well being**

In my opinion, it is a misconception that you cannot achieve a stable wage in the arts. If you work freelance, it is certainly more difficult, but then that goes for being a freelancer in any industry.

In my current position as Youth and Education Coordinator at Pavilion Dance South West, I often frequent options evenings at schools. I’m greeted by parents who ask me the same thing every time: “But there’s no money in the arts, is there?” and “How many people actually end up with a job in the arts?” Actually, over 170,000 people in the UK work in the arts industry, and with the UK now being a world leader in the field, other countries are looking our way to develop the next generation of the workforce. That’s where teaching the arts in schools comes in.

On the other hand, it’s not just about getting young people to pursue a career in the arts. As mentioned previously, the arts provide young people with skills that are vital in many of today’s industries, but also the arts offer greater flexibility in career pathways. Someone may start out as a dancer before moving on to become a producer or stage manager, and it’s because arts courses equip students with the knowledge to become all three, which means this is possible.

It is a huge ask to get a 14 year old to tell you what they would like to do for the rest of their life. A sprinkling of arts subjects in their portfolio means that they have more
For the reasons stated in the first half of this paper, it is my opinion that dance should be included in the new national curriculum because it helps to reach so many areas that the education system has been previously tasked with making sure young people achieve. In the second half of this paper, I will be focusing on other reasons for dance to become a vital part of school life; namely that dance, the arts and culture are parts of what make us human. I will also offer some suggested solutions to the issues I have discussed.

**Wider Arts and Cultural Context**

Darren Henley refers to the benefits that the arts have to our society as “developing an understanding of our common cultural heritage” [Henley 12]. From nursery school onwards we learn about different cultures through dance, painting and music. In modern Britain, culture and the arts are sometimes seen as either a representation of something foreign, or something historical, or as a luxury for the upper classes.

However, anthropologically speaking, dance has always been a huge part of human life. Many anthropologists from across the world have studied tribes of the past and present, and are continually finding dance at the heart of human life:

> To be able to dance was seen as a prerequisite of being human, as essential to survival as the ability to breathe or walk.

*Catharine Dulin quotes Grau in Physical Education or Art? pg. 60*

If dance is essential to humanity, why are we leaving it out of our education systems? I would argue that it is because modern humans have become too focused on business and other industries. It is my belief that the government still see education as building the next workforce for the country; they want more lawyers, doctors, scientists and engineers, but if the next generation only serve as doctors, scientists and engineers culture as we know it would die out.

**The Solution**

Recent discussions around the ArtsMark in schools has led to what I can only describe as a contradiction. Schools now need a significant amount of dance activity in their school to be considered for the ArtsMark Award, and yet dance is not considered an arts subject under the national curriculum; it’s under PE. I think the
first step for us to solve the problem of dance’s status in education, is to put it in its rightful category.

Government recognizes the important contribution that our great cultural institutions make to education and intends to support access to and appreciation of the arts and culture.

Darren Henley quotes Ed Vaizey in Cultural Education in England, pg. 13

It’s the word “access” in the above quote that gets to me, as I’m still struggling with this idea that if young people aren’t given access to the arts in schools, some of them will never experience the industry. So the solution perhaps lies in arts organisations getting into schools to prove their worth to the teachers there, and demonstrating how something like dance can be used to help teach what is on the national curriculum, rather than waiting for the national curriculum to catch up with arts organisations.

In some ways, this seems a viable option, but not without its problems. Take Art found that teachers feel underappreciated in their own schools, and my work has sometimes echoed this sentiment. They find that dance departments are asked to provide a performance for a school open evening, for example, but the senior management team will not provide money to support dance curriculum time. Take Art have responded by encouraging schools to take part in youth dance platforms. This gives the young people, perhaps even in an out of school club capacity, something to work towards. Any prestige achieved from being involved in these platforms can then help towards changing the minds of the senior management.

I find myself finding ways to make dance work for what is in the national curriculum all the time. We offer various CPD sessions at Pavilion Dance South West, some of them instructing Primary School teachers on how to incorporate the subject into the creative curriculum, and some giving secondary school PE teachers the skills to teach dance successfully for the first time.

At a recent event held by the Real Ideas Organisation, one of the Arts Council’s Bridge Organisations, that was focused on the new national curriculum for primary age children, the delegates were asked to think of the new curriculum as an opportunity for arts organisations, rather than as an obstacle. I fully agree with this sentiment; it is time for us to find new and innovative ways to work with the education sector, instead of allowing ourselves to get stuck in the mud of dance not being in the right category or not having enough airtime on the pages of the official documents.

The government can correct their mistake later.
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